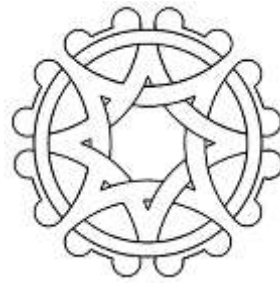


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The Kirkmichael Trust
FRIENDS OF KIRKMICHAEL – EXTENDED NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2017
Kirkmichael in the Black Isle



This newsletter is sent to you because you have supported the Kirkmichael project financially or in other ways. If you don't want to receive more newsletters, please tell us via info@kirkmichael.info. As we are coming to the end of the current project we thought it would be good to review what has been achieved and give an indication of new work to which we are looking forward. The current work was funded to 40% by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and hence we use their targets in reporting to you our achievements, summarising a massive evaluation report. Future newsletters will revert to a shorter format!

The project grew out of the concern of the local community on the north side of the Black Isle and beyond over the increasing deterioration of the Scheduled Monument and Listed Building at Kirkmichael. The buildings here had originated as a Roman Catholic church in the early 1400s, becoming a protestant kirk following the Reformation in Scotland in 1560, when the chancel was converted to a mausoleum. Following the building of a new combined church at Resolis in 1769, providing for the congregations of both Kirkmichael and adjacent Cullicudden, the nave was also converted to a mausoleum. The external and internal mausolea are of considerable architectural and heritage interest, but were falling derelict. The other half of our story was concern over the continuing deterioration of the nationally-important set of ornate medieval gravestones found in the Kirkmichael and nearby Cullicudden kirkyards.

The project took these two problems and found one solution, in that the buildings were repaired and restored, and inside the stabilised and re-roofed nave was created an outstanding exhibition of the most at-risk medieval ornate stones. These were complemented by a typical post-reformation ornate stone, heavy with protestant symbols of mortality, and two specially carved "as new" medieval stones, to show the impact the original stones would have had when new.

The Kirkmichael Trust was formed by members of Resolis Community Council and other concerned members of the community and worked for more than 10 years to develop the project proposals and secure the funding from multiple partners, including Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Environment Scotland, the Highland Council, the Robertson Trust, the Sainsbury Family Trust, the Wolfson Foundation, the Foyle Foundation, the Pilgrim Trust, Urquhart Clan and family donations, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Mushroom Trust, Garfield Weston, the Hugh Fraser Foundation and many more funding bodies and private contributors. Lots of generous people contributed to an on-line Crowdfunding appeal. We are incredibly grateful to everybody who pulled together to raise the funding for Kirkmichael.

The successful restoration project was managed by McGregor Bowes acting as lead consultant, architect and contract administrator, reporting to the Chairman of the Kirkmichael Trust. Laing Traditional Masonry (LTM) were the main builders, with David Narro Associates acting as structural engineers, Torrance Partnership the quantity surveyor, and Highland Archaeology Services providing archaeological supervision. The Trust separately managed the one year part-time Project Development Officer (Verity Walker of Interpretation), the Interpretation Team (Chris Bowes coordinating work by Studio SP, Caroline Vawdrey, LTM and others) and smaller contracts.

The building work was complemented by an ambitious Activity Programme, delivered by the Trust and the Project Development Officer.

We could have been over-stretched financially had it not been for the incredible work by volunteers who, often in difficult weather, carried out immense tasks including: ivy removal from buildings and kirkyard dykes, removal of rotten timber from collapsed nave roof, separation of slates from collapsed nave roof and stockpiling for re-use, digging the drainage trenches, digging the power cable access trench, painting the metal supports for our medieval stone exhibition, replacing the rescued medieval slabs with new sandstone slabs of the same size, erecting the external interpretation boards, sieving under archaeologist supervision many tonnes of soil deposited by gravediggers in the nave and chancel, turfing or sowing with grass seed the many bare areas of soil exposed by the workings, and countless other tasks. Volunteers continue to meet every Saturday to carry out maintenance from 10 to noon and all are welcome to join in!

Okay, that's the summary of what's been achieved over the project so far – let's now look at our outcomes, before looking to the future!

The physical rescue and repair of Kirkmichael has achieved the following benefits:

1. Restoring public access to a heritage asset
2. Economic development through creation of a new visitor draw
3. Acting as a catalyst for the restoration and development of other derelict buildings in the north
4. Securing, developing and interpreting an important historic building (Scheduled Monument and Listed Building)
5. Securing, exhibiting and interpreting important ornate gravestones (part of the Scheduled Monument of Cullicudden)
6. Harnessing significant public and private funding

The complementary activity within the Activities Programme offered and encouraged participation by schools and the public generally in its workshops, training and skills taster courses and education programme and also provided and supported:

1. Open Days and workshops 2016/2017
2. Downloadable primary school education and teachers resources pack
3. Published materials including four leaflets and a book ‘Tales from Kirkmichael’
4. A significant website archive of local and national family and historical information in the “Story behind the Stone” series
5. Development and training opportunities for volunteers and apprentices
6. The development of links with other regional heritage organisations



Some of the stunning ornate medieval stones now erected within Kirkmichael, with the seating arrangement providing interpretation and with inbuilt recesses to provide visitors with each of the leaflets.



Above: primary school children are naturally enthusiastic.

Below: But initially blasé secondary school boys become totally absorbed in identifying and photographing symbols of mortality – how cool is that!



The community have been involved every step of the way



Above: The medieval ornate stones transported to Kirkmichael and **Below:** installed



Target 1: Repair and restore the gravestones and mausolea at Kirkmichael

All the gravestones and mausolea identified at the outset have been successfully repaired and restored. Some further work to repair and restore additional unstable or fallen gravestones was also carried out, as agreed with HLF. This was achieved through work by the conservators and builders within Laing Traditional Masonry, memorial sculptors Hoods of Dingwall and much work by volunteers themselves.

The external mausolea had to be partly dismantled in order to rebuild, and some sections of perished sandstone were replaced. The Grant of Ardoch mausoleum was repaired, rebuilt and a new gate installed. An easily maintained base of broken slates sourced from the kirk buildings themselves was laid over a membrane on the floor of the Grant of Ardoch enclosure. The arched tomb recess was rebuilt and a membrane placed over it on which compost and a green roof of sedum were installed. The Lady Ardoch mausoleum was rebuilt, the memorial plaque repaired, several new roofing and wall stones inserted, a membrane put over the top to prevent rainwater access and clay, soil and compost installed into which a green cover of sedum was planted.

Gravestones and walls which had fallen or were unstable were re-erected or stabilised. Internally, memorials were removed temporarily, cleaned, previous unsympathetic repair with cement mortar removed, repaired, stabilised and protected from damp by a membrane inserted between them and the wall. Two small sections of marble memorials which could not be located in the soil below them were replaced with composite material.

Physically, all that was intended was achieved by the project. The two external mausolea and two internal mausolea at Kirkmichael, and all the gravestones identified at the project approval stage, and many more, were repaired and restored. More than that, the repair and restoration work has met with the overwhelming approval of the community and visitors. This finding comes out of the questionnaires completed for the activities carried out on site, summarised later, universally positive. However, this is dwarfed by the hundreds of unsolicited positive comments, and no negative comments at all, posted on our Facebook pages.





Repair and restoration of the Grants of Ardoch mausoleum



Repair and restoration of the Gun Munro mausoleum



Repair and restoration of the Lady Ardoch tomb, with sedum green roof over a membrane to prevent water ingress

Repair and restoration of some of the gravestones and mausolea at Kirkmichael



Repair and restoration of the chancel mausoleum



Smashed wall memorial put back in shape before infill with resin and powdered stone to repair



Repair and restoration of the medieval arched tomb recess

Target 2: Re-roof and restore the kirk

The buildings were all successfully re-roofed and restored as proposed. This was achieved through work by the conservators and builders within Laing Traditional Masonry with much assistance by volunteers. The walls were repaired and stabilised and holes or cracks made good, having confirmed their initial stability through engineers David Narro Associates. Soil dumped within the nave over decades by gravediggers was sifted to remove human remains, coins (all 17th – early 18th century origin) and other artefacts by volunteers under Highland Archaeology Services staff supervision, thereby providing valuable training for the volunteers concerned. One such volunteer has been inspired to take up a related science course at Dundee University and was shortlisted in the 2017 Heritage Angel Awards for her work at Kirkmichael.

The floor having been levelled to the appropriate depth, preparations for flooring of Caithness slabs were put in, along with electrical services, and then the Caithness slabs themselves. New beams, sarking, membrane and slates were installed to create new roofs for chancel and nave, the slates being re-used, hand cut slates, including those from Kirkmichael assessed to be in sufficiently good condition to be re-used. Rooflights on the north side were introduced. Lead sheeting around eaves and finials was introduced. The original finial on the east gable, which had fallen off ten years before in a clump of ivy, was reinstated, and the two finials on the nave were cut as new from sandstone as the originals (as seen on the 1906 picture of the building) had long since disappeared. Gutters to carry away roofwater were installed and painted with a micaceous iron oxide preparation.

Volunteers under archaeologist supervision dug the power cable access track from kirkyard wall to the wall of the building, and also dug all the drains from north and south sides of the building to and through the perimeter dyke to the drain outside. Volunteers also cut out the turf, under archaeologist supervision, to create the routes for new paths and improved access.

Physically, all that was intended was achieved by the project. Both the nave and the chancel were re-roofed, using as many of the original slates as were in good condition. Interestingly the Ballachulish slates were in perfect condition whilst the Easdale slates generally were in very poor condition.

The fact that the restoration was nominated and short-listed for the Scottish Heritage Angel Awards in 2017, one of only three in Scotland in the “Best Rescue of an Historic Building” category, points to widespread and critical approval of the restoration project.

To complement the shortlisting award, the re-roofing and kirk restoration work has met with a universally positive reaction from the community and the public. This has been the response at our many Open Days and workshops.

When the scaffolding came down to reveal the new look of the buildings, despite much restoration work still needing to be done, the subsequent post on Facebook reached 18,995 people, garnered 134 likes and much complimentary correspondence.



18,995 people reached

[Boost Post](#)

Like

Comment

Share



134

Chronological ▾

32 shares

[View 21 more comments](#)

[Yvonne Stewart](#) Wow! What a fantastic achievement. Well done all involved!

Target 3: Establish a heritage centre interpreting the genealogical and archaeological significance of the site

Kirkmichael's many heritage interests are now attractively displayed and have become a recognised draw, attracting local visitors and tourists, as well as the anticipated heritage tours from Inverness and from cruise-liners at Invergordon. Inside the buildings and in the kirkyard, quiet but informative interpretation panels tell the ever-evolving story of Kirkmichael from medieval times to now, and the stories of the families buried and memorialised at Kirkmichael.

The interpretation panels were designed by Studio SP and created by Old School Fabrications, with words by Caroline Vawdrey, photography by Andrew Dowsett and research by Jim Mackay.

The nationally significant collection of ornate medieval cross gravestones erected within the nave has attracted much attention in the media. The stones, having been lifted, treated and repaired by LTM conservators were mounted in specially-designed steel supports which allow them to be held securely in a vertical position, well off the floor for maximum effect, and lighting has been installed to display the ancient patterns to maximum effect. Slabs of the same size as the originals were placed in the original locations by volunteers; the replacement slabs tell where the originals may be located. It is intended to submit this part of the project for a Heritage Angel award in 2018, given the certain loss of these stones if they had not been rescued and put on display for future generations to enjoy. The scope of this part of the project was increased by agreement with HLF when it became apparent that there would be underspend in the capital building costs and it has been a recognised success.



The medieval stones are complemented by excellent seating arrangements created by Studio SP, incorporating timber from pews from the church that replaced Kirkmichael in 1769, heating units, donation box and leaflet holders.

As well as on-site interpretation, the Trust has developed its website massively to provide a major new resource of heritage interest. The website contains school resource material, a wide selection of information provided under its detailed “Story behind the Stone” series, downloadable leaflets, aerial drone films of the project throughout its development. Whilst the website acts as the repository of information, there is no doubting that Facebook is now the best mechanism for raising awareness of events and information.



The ground-breaking “Story behind the Stone” series

Watch our building progress here over the next few months!

Click here to return to the Kirkmichael main menu
Place your cursor on the picture to pause the display



A carousel of progress with the building works

Target 4: Develop partnerships with other regional heritage attractions to deliver a programme of events coordinated by a part-time Project Development Officer employed for one year

An ambitious Activity Programme had been agreed with HLF, and this was successfully delivered by the project, greatly exceeding targets. Following competitive tender, human dynamo Verity Walker of Interpretation was appointed as Project Development Officer for a year from 1 February 2016 to 31 January 2017. The Trust continued to develop the programme of activities thereafter.

The programme of activities included schools in the Black Isle and Easter Ross becoming engaged in heritage activities at Kirkmichael and other heritage sites across the region; workshops in traditional crafts such as stone carving and nail-making; open days; guided tours; visits into schools and school visits to Kirkmichael; student involvement; complementary website activity between Kirkmichael and many other regional heritage attractions; engagement in the Highland Archaeology Festival, the Scotland Doors Open Days programme and ARCH (Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands) events.

We developed several online regional heritage trails, including a unique one where the viewer can build up and download a guide to the sites on a tour of his or her own choosing. We have mentioned the paper and downloadable guides to Kirkmichael and other heritage sites as trails. One of our additional targets was production of a Kirkmichael booklet, but there was such interest in Kirkmichael it was agreed with HLF to expand this to a Kirkmichael book, all work except printing being resourced by the Trust. This is a lasting memento of the project.

A further addition to the programme arose from the decision to incorporate two specially carved “as new” medieval ornate gravestones to be incorporated within the seating arrangements within the nave and chancel as an attractive and educational feature. The carving was complemented by a popular on-line blog of the carving process, a workshop training event, and an evening illustrated lecture on stone-carving in nearby school, Fortrose Academy, all carried out by the carvers (David Lindsay and Richard Groom of Stoneworks) complemented by Trust volunteer activity.





Above: clay memento mori tiles created by school-children on display on a gravestone at the Royal Launch in April 2017; centre HRH The Duke of Gloucester receives a posy from Lucy McIver of Resolis Primary School, who also played the pipes at the event; far right: pupils of Cromarty, Resolis and Tore primaries rehearse the Kirkmichael song “Walter the Heron” under the yew trees during a sleet storm at the Royal Launch.





Cromarty Primary Medieval Menu herb tasting



Tore Primary making memento mori tiles



Tore Primary showing off decorated project hard hats



Trainee, stone carving workshop



Kirkmichael Trust Treasurer plastering



Local conservation trust chairman and trainee applying a wash



Local pupil Lucy McIver playing pipes at Kirkmichael at the Royal Launch and our Public Open Day.

The **traditional nail-making demonstration** at Newhall Smiddy with blacksmith John Smith on **30 January, 2017**. A video of this was placed on Facebook.



Project archaeologist leads off a tour



Local artist examines Kirkmichael
Creative embroidery



Marquee at Resolis Country Fair



Trainer slaking lime



S6 student reading HES free booklet



Trainee carving his stone



Meet the architect



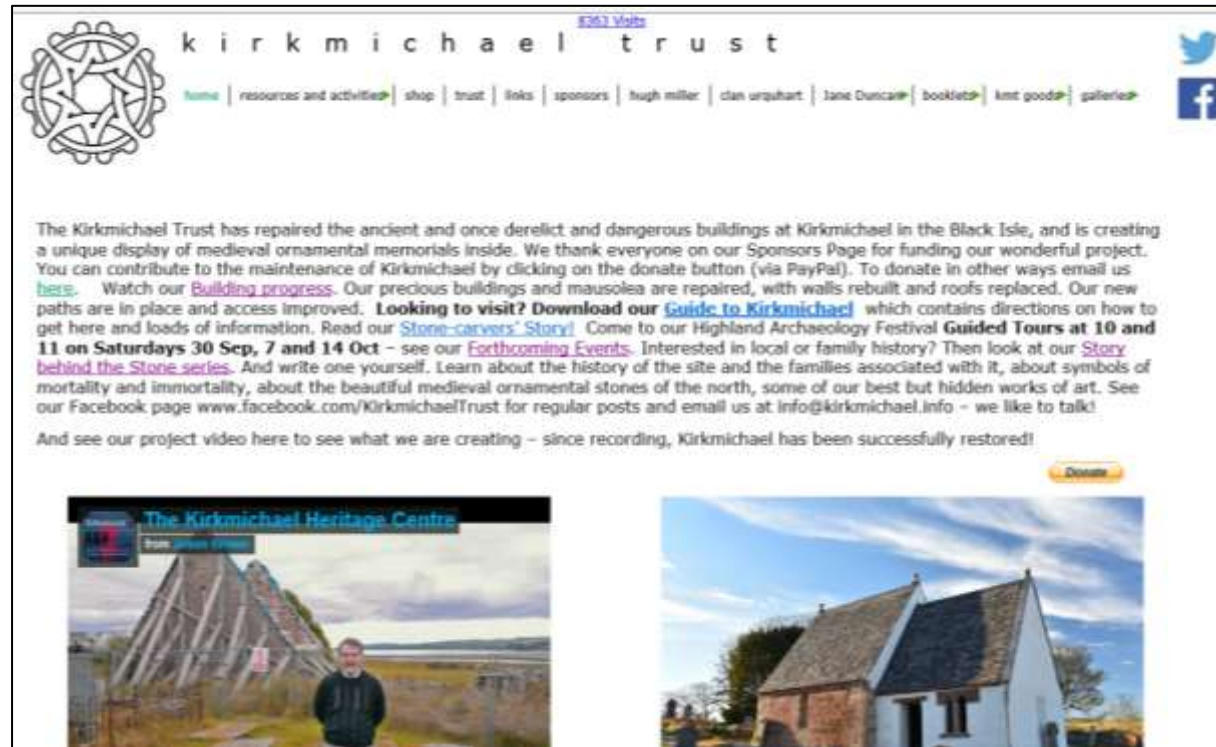
Kirkmichael training display



Left: The Trust at a community event in Resolis Memorial Hall
 Right: The Trust at the Black Isle Gathering 2017 in Fortrose Academy



The Kirkmichael website as a whole constitutes the community archive of the project. The website www.kirkmichael.info is now a phenomenal resource for local people and visitors with an interest in the Highlands alike. It requires redesign to make it more mobile-friendly and tablet-friendly in due course.



The interpretive material within the interpretation panels internally and externally was written by Caroline Vawdrey, based on research notes by Dr Jim Mackay. Complementary photography was created by Andrew Dowsett, and Studio SP put it together into interpretation panels that are both understated but colourful and informative. The book “Tales from Kirkmichael” and the three Kirkmichael printed leaflets were written by Dr Jim Mackay with photography by Andrew Dowsett, with another downloadable written and illustrated by Verity Walker, and another two guides produced in conjunction with the Trust and downloadable from other host websites.

There are now three Kirkmichael printed leaflets. These and a fourth are available to download directly from the Kirkmichael website on www.kirkmichael.info/LeafletsPage.html. These are

1. Guide to Kirkmichael. Also available at Kirkmichael in paper form, it provides a guide for visitors for all the key features around the site.
2. Guide to Gravestone Symbols found at Kirkmichael and Cullicudden. Also available at Kirkmichael in paper form, it explains the history to the symbols found on the stones in the Highlands, from pre-Reformation through post-Reformation and Victorian fancies through to the present day.
3. From Head-sets to Headstones. Also available at Kirkmichael in paper form, this leaflet describes burial practice from prehistoric times in the Black Isle through to the present day.
4. Explore the Chanonry – a Walking Trail Around Early Fortrose. Not available in paper form. It provides a walking guide for visitors around the ancient town of Fortrose. At one time, every parish in the Black Isle like Kirkmichael looked towards the Cathedral at Fortrose, and there are many links between the two sites.

In addition, linked on the Kirkmichael website are two additional guides.

5. Kirkmichael features on the Black Isle Visitor Guide produced by the Black Isle Tourist Team, with whom the Kirkmichael Trust has worked in partnership. This lively guide covers both heritage and natural interests across the Black Isle and its villages.
6. Kirkmichael also features on the unique “Hidden Black Isle” trail. A fascinating range of rarely-visited “Hidden Black Isle” religious stops like the Preaching Station at Ferintosh and Old Cullicudden. This trail is curated by Verity Walker as part of the Kirkmichael Trust’s 2016/7 partnership project with the Black Isle Tourism Team. The Black Isle Info website even allows you to select which sites you would like to be on your own guided tour, and you can print off your own itinerary. Very ingenious! All sites which have been included in the trail have agreed to post a link or otherwise promote the Kirkmichael project once it opens to the public.

A Walk around Munloch (Ross and Cromarty)

Walk leaflet to explore Munloch, created by ARCH project. Available from the [ARCH website](#).

Evanton Airfield Past and Present (Ross and Cromarty)

Trail of WWII remains at Evanton, created by ARCH project. Available from Cornerstone Café in Evanton and the [ARCH website](#).

Hidden Black Isle Trail (Ross and Cromarty)

Trail to some of the hidden gems, mainly heritage, on the Black Isle. Available on the web at <http://www.black-isle.info/hidden.asp>

Guide to Kirkmichael in the Black Isle (Ross and Cromarty)

A guide to the church and graveyard. Available on the Kirkmichael Trust website

Explore the 'Chanonry' – a walking tour around early Fortrose (Ross and Cromarty)

Walking tour of Fortrose produced by the Kirkmichael Trust. Available on the Kirkmichael Trust website



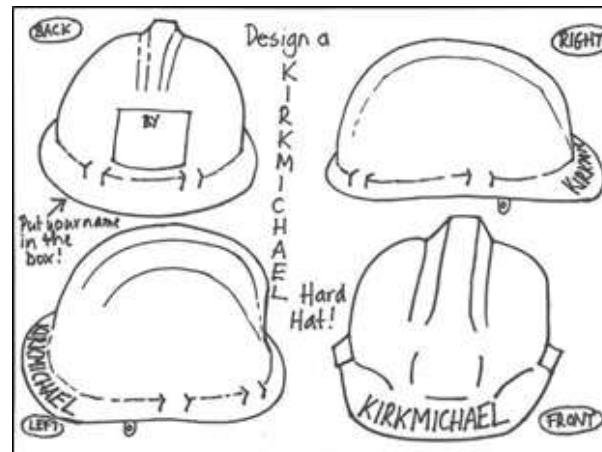


Left to right: Resources prepared for joint activity with ARCH at Rosskeen; pupil using activity sheet at Kilmuir Easter; Memento Mori sheet

Within our learning pages online www.kirkmichael.info/SchoolsResourcesPage.html we have:

- ‘kirkyard detective’ sheet which can be adapted to each school’s needs
- symbols of mortality and immortality activity sheet
- mediaeval menu activity notes plus Kirkmichael bannock recipe
- model risk assessment for a burial ground visit
- ‘Draw/measure the kirk’ activity sheet
- guidance notes for primary and secondary schools on curricular areas which can be tapped into though Kirkmichael and the Resolis Stones

We have also developed a set of 12 images suitable for a powerpoint presentation in class which tell the story of Kirkmichael.

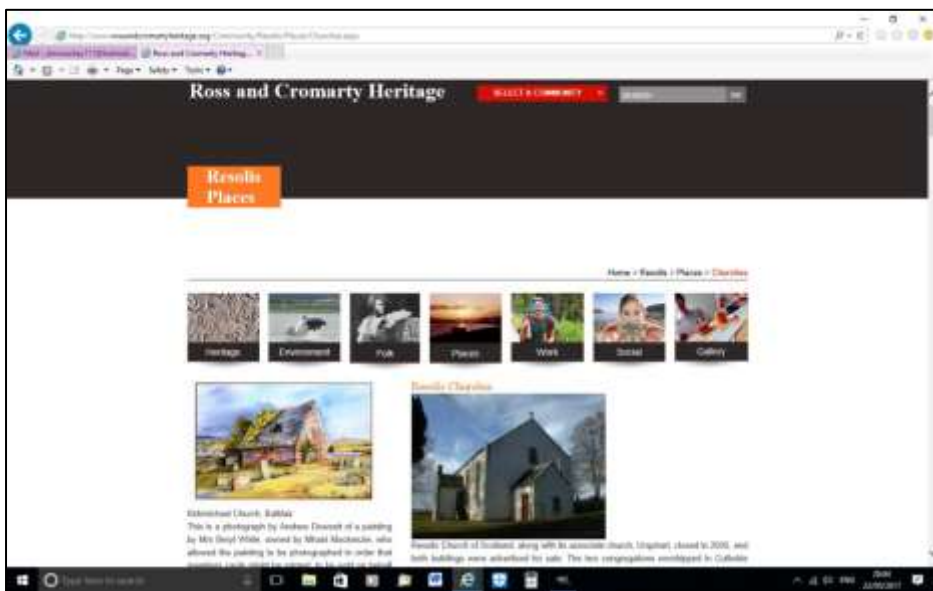
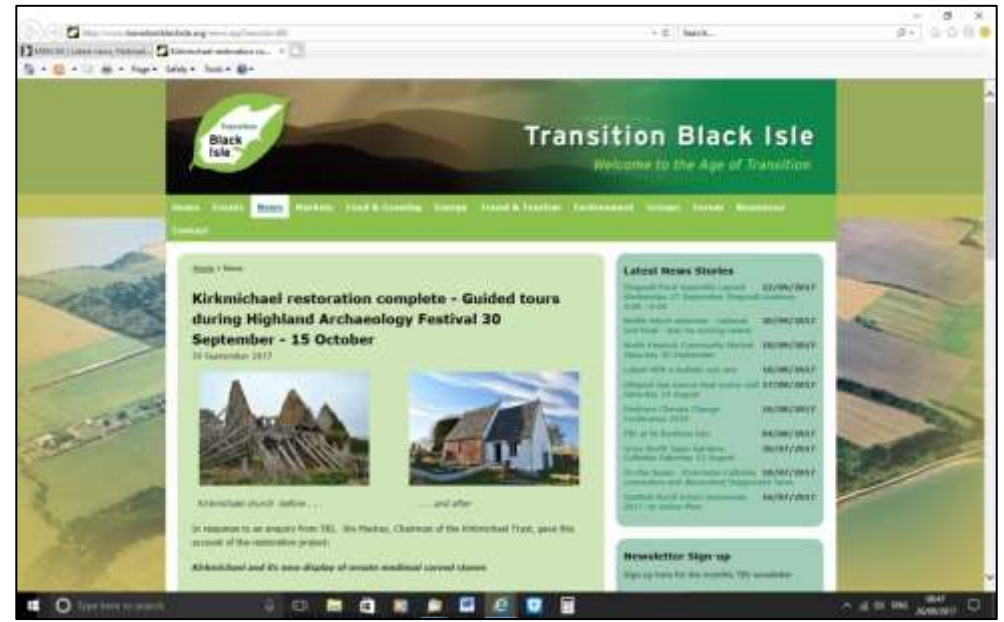
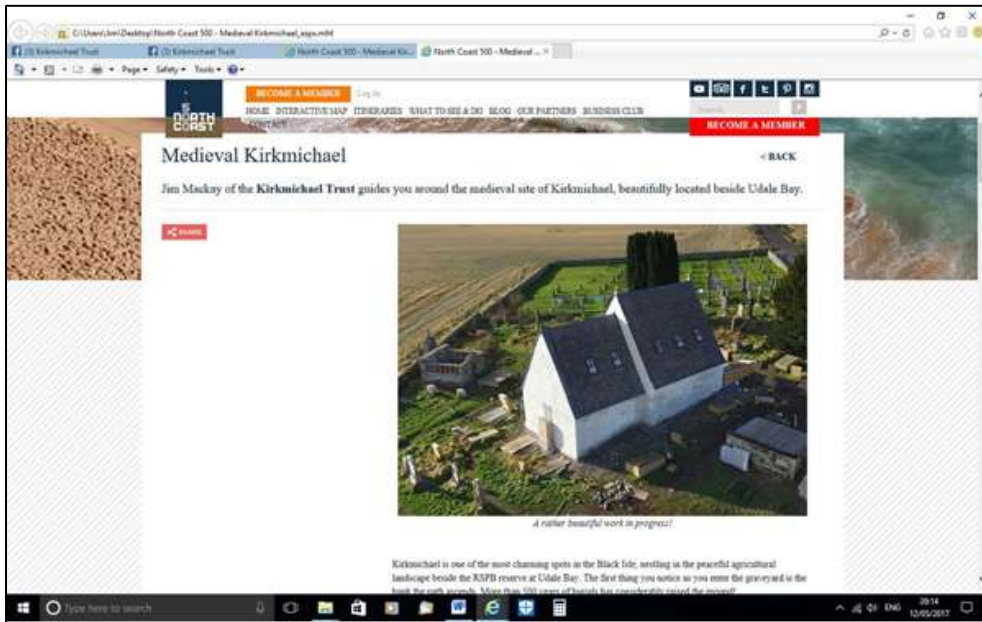


The range of websites featuring the heritage interests at Kirkmichael has steadily increased over the project period, and we are aware of at least 15 websites with substantial material devoted to Kirkmichael. Crucially, this includes the North Coast 500 website, given the importance of this route to bring in visitors. Kirkmichael has its own NC500 blog.

Websites with Kirkmichael content include the following: Groam House Museum, Black-Isle Info, Large Holiday Homes Scotland, Cromarty East Church,



North Coast 500, Transition Black Isle, Ross and Cromarty Heritage, Culbokie Community Trust, Chatterbox, Evanton Community Trust, The Friends of Hugh Miller, Council of Scottish Clans Association, Clan Urquhart website, Seaboard Gaelic website and ARCH. There are news items on countless other websites.



We worked with many other heritage groups and centres in the region over the project period and have established links which will continue to mutual benefit. One of the closest is with ARCH. The success of Kirkmichael has resulted in other communities seeking to learn from our experience (and avoid our mistakes) in seeking to preserve and interpret their own heritage.



Attendees at tour of Kiltearn Old Church; ECT lead off joint-tour of Alness Old Church; Trust members meet Tarbat Discovery Centre staff and trustees



From left to right: Hugh Miller Storytelling in Cromarty Library; Photographer with Memento Mori exhibition in Cromarty including much Kirkmichael content; 'Ask the architect' table at Resolis Country Fair



From left to right: HOSTGA guide training session; Passengers from Mein Schiff visit Kirkmichael; HOSTGA guides on-site at Kirkmichael





From left to right above: Pupils decipher Latin inscription at Rosskeen; pupils get into war grave research at Rosskeen; pupils explore Kilmuir Easter with Trust Chairman; Fortrose pupils explore Fortrose Cathedral kirkyard with Trust Chairman, teachers and parents. From left to right below: pupils explore Kiltearn Old Kirkyard with the Trust; pupils being shown the difference between Ballachulish and Easdale slates at Kirkmichael; tour to Alness Kirkyard.



The Kirkmichael Trust has always considered kirkyards to be one of the most under-appreciated heritage resources in Scotland, on your doorstep but often sadly neglected and rarely entered. The target was therefore included to engage secondary school pupils with visits to and activities within kirkyards in Easter Ross and the Black Isle to familiarise students with what may be found within kirkyards and to get them over the hurdle of entering a burial ground.

Kirkyards included in this exercise were Rosskeen, Alness, Kiltearn and Kilmuir Easter in Easter Ross, and Fortrose Cathedral kirkyard and Kirkmichael in the Black Isle. Alness Academy and Invergordon Academy engaged particularly in a World War II war graves aspect. We invited ARCH (the local community archaeology team) to take part in partnership with Invergordon Museum's WWII project. We were able to draw everything together under one over-arching theme of Highlanders and Conflict.

Archaeology



Left to right: Archaeology volunteers manning the riddle; what they found! (including flint arrowhead, many coins), excavating in the nave

Our Archaeology on Site period took place over 16 days from 17 October – 4 November 2016. HAS made contact with NOSAS (North of Scotland Archaeology Society) etc for participation and ARCH (Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands) assisted with joint promotion. All 20 available places were filled, including one local student, and an average of 6 volunteers were on site daily.



Volunteer work parties

Since March 2017, a work party has taken place every Saturday morning between 10 am and 12 noon. Their work has included landscaping, levelling soil, preparing ground, turving bare areas where immediate effect was needed, sowing grass seed on areas of less immediate importance, straightening slabs, removal of dead ivy, painting, recording stones, emplacement of replacement slabs, levelling of car park area. Much of this can be seen on our Facebook and website pages.





The Kirkmichael project simply could not have been successful without the input of so many keen, hard-working, dedicated volunteers.

The “as-new” medieval ornate stone carving

It was considered during the project itself that the seating arrangements in the nave and chancel at Kirkmichael needed to be something special to complement the quality of the rest of the project. At the same time, there were two ornate medieval stones that were too damaged, worn and fragile to consider relocating. The idea was born to commission stone-carvers to create two “as-new” ornate stones based upon the medieval stones, but to give the impact they would have had as when freshly carved. An enhanced “Display and Interpretation Plan” was agreed with HLF, and following this Richard Groome and David Lindsay of Stoneworks were appointed following competitive tender to create two new stones and to provide a set of activities to be delivered by themselves with support from the Kirkmichael Trust.

The activities were delivered by:

- a) A practical one-day training workshop carried on by the two stone-carvers in the open air at Kirkmichael on trestles laid out at Kirkmichael Corner. Facebook and the website were used to draw in trainees, and twelve were given practical training of half-a-day each. The trainees ranged from those merely interested in learning more about the practice to those who wanted to use it to see if they wished to take it up more seriously. All were given a stone block and training in how to cut a pattern within it, and participants were encouraged to take away as a memento the block they had carved.
- b) An illustrated evening lecture in Fortrose Academy delivered by the two stone-carvers. The event was publicised on Facebook and the website and by a set of posters in local hubs. The audience of 23 were enthralled by the professional story of the trade and business of stone carving and history of some of the more famous stones carved by the two stone-carvers.
- c) The stone-carvers provided material regularly for a blog on the whole process of carving the stones for Kirkmichael, through from examining the original stones in situ, agreeing designs with the Trust, taking advice from HES specialists, obtaining the correct stone, the techniques of carving, right through to delivery of the stones at Kirkmichael. The Trust released this information at regular intervals in an abbreviated form on Facebook but in a full form as a continuously-expanding story on its own page on the website: www.kirkmichael.info/CarvingOfNewMedievalStones.html, complemented by drawings and photography of the carving, the locations, the carvers and the stones in place, including HRH the Duke of Gloucester at Kirkmichael discussing the stones with the carvers themselves.



The Future

And that's our review of the project thus far. Apologies for its length, but you can see that there has been much activity. But with the current project drawing to an end, what does the future hold for us? Various suggestions have already been made, and we'll be looking at these in more detail soon.

Management and maintenance of the site

A very sensible condition of HLF funding was drawing up a long term management and maintenance programme for Kirkmichael. This involves annual inspection of electrics, gutters, slates etc. and less frequent refreshing of lime washing, repointing as necessary and so on. It is absolutely essential to avoid a recurrence of the spiral of decline that resulted in near-dereliction of the site in the past.

Further repair of memorials

The Trust has funded stabilisation and re-erection of stones within the kirkyard at Kirkmichael. There are a few remaining which are more challenging.

The biggest is a tablestone adjacent to the Lady Ardoch mausoleum onto which a large granite urn was thoughtlessly dropped many years ago, we suspect by grasscutters moving the urn out of the way. The tablestone shattered and seriously detracts from the appearance of Kirkmichael – the Duke of Gloucester drew attention to it during the Royal Launch. We think a steel plate mounted on the legs of the tablestone, slightly smaller than the tablestone itself so that it remains unnoticed, but on which the slab could be pieced together again, is the answer.

Another sandstone headstone lying on the soil near the Lady Ardoch mausoleum is a trip hazard but we cannot re-erect it as the sandstone is coming apart along its planes. This stone needs to be dried and bonded together again before re-erection.

Further development of the ornate stone display

As revealed at the Archaeology Conference in October 2017 in Inverness, excavations at Kirkmichael revealed a marvellous heritage of four “claymore stones” including a marvellous Urquhart one – slabs from the period immediately after the Reformation of 1560 when the previous ornate symbology was anathema but before the protestant “symbols of mortality” symbology developed. They represent a key part of the story of gravestone development in the Highlands, and yet all four slabs are buried. Our nave display leaps straight from the ornate crosses to the symbols of mortality slab of the McCullochs of Udale. The display is crying out for one of the claymore slabs to be mounted to show the full story of the development of the symbology of the area and our gravestone heritage.

The Braelangwell pediments

The most striking post-Restoration memorial in Kirkmichael is, arguably, the wall memorial to William Urquhart of Braelangwell, which mentions his parents, the Reverend Thomas Urquhart and Henrietta Douglas, although there is no memorial to them. However, investigations by the Trust have found that a triangular stone built into the garden wall at Braelangwell House (and deteriorating due to exposure), and a separate, broken, triangular stone currently stored in the cellar at Braelangwell House, are the window pediments of an earlier Braelangwell House celebrating Thomas Urquhart and Henrietta Douglas. We would like to have these repaired and placed on the wall beside the doorway in the chancel at Kirkmichael to protect them and to complement the Urquhart of Braelangwell wall memorial already there.

Gravestone protection

The mowing regime at kirkyards in the Highlands has recently started causing even more damage to gravestones than previously due to the type of machines deployed. There is therefore an urgent need to put protection around our most vulnerable stones. Simple timber surrounds had been previously utilised at Kirkmichael but had deteriorated, and fresh timber surrounds would now be appropriate.

Dyke repairs

The Trust commissioned skilled dykers to repair the south-west corner of the kirkyard dyke which had fallen down. This needed to be done with great care as it is part of the Kirkmichael Listed Building, and at this collapsed corner two different styles of dyke construction come together. This was very successfully achieved but it has directed attention to other problems with the dyke. The north west corner is cracked and may collapse at some point. The east dyke has been badly weakened by ivy penetration. The south wall at the east end had begun to lean outwards and the Trust took emergency action to bulwark this on the outside with soil to prop it up before it collapsed. The parapet of rounded stones around much of the dyke is requiring new lime plaster.

Straightening of tilted headstones

The Trust contracted Hoods of Dingwall to re-erect fallen headstones and stabilise those which presented a risk to the public from being unsteady in their mountings. There are several which were not so urgently in need of stabilisation but are still tilting over to an uncomfortable level, and it would be good to commission stone masons to make these safe as well.

Straightening of tablestones

Tablestones were intrinsically a faulty design. The full weight of a more than 500 kg slab pressed down on two vertical end slabs, with the result that these end slabs often differentially settled into the soil, leaving the top slab tilting over precariously. The Trust successfully remedied this in one particular high risk tablestone at Kirkmichael, lifting off the top slab, setting the end slabs in the soil evenly and replacing the top slab. There are several in Kirkmichael also crying out for attention, including one currently propped up with odd stones and bricks in a very unsightly and unsafe manner.

Chancel pathway

The edging of the path as it rises to the chancel doorway needs better definition to prevent hardcore eroding from the path and falling upon the slabs beside it.

Photogrammetry and other recording techniques

Several of the most important stones in Kirkmichael bear script and designs just on the border of legibility. These include the memorial stone in the medieval arched tomb recess, where the writing is almost readable, and a slab which bears an axe and an unidentifiable further object. Several of the worn medieval ornate stones are crying out, we have been told by experts in photogrammetry, for photogrammetric techniques to be applied to them to bring out the ornate patterns. It would be of considerable heritage value to apply photogrammetric methods to selected stones in Kirkmichael and on similar slabs elsewhere, such as the Mortlach pre-Reformation ornate stone, which bears script around its perimeter.

Extension of path around building

Currently the new path extends from the chancel door around the south side of the building to the nave door. The excavations of this were dug by Trust volunteers under archaeologist supervision. A muddy desire line has quite understandably sprung up going around the back of the building, taking in the Lady

Ardoch tomb and the medieval arched tomb recess. It would be desirable to carry the current path at least past the arched tomb recess and past the Lady Ardoch tomb. The remaining length needs a longer period to be assessed to see the level of traffic it bears.

Ivy and roses

Trust volunteers have spent cumulatively months in cutting and removing ivy. It is currently not in any way a problem, but experience has shown how quickly ivy can recover. It is essential that ivy is dealt with immediately on its re-appearance.

Similarly, a dog rose which was allowed to grow in the arched tomb recess eventually caused parts of the tomb to tumble, and this was remedied only at considerable expense by re-construction following examination of old photographs. The Trust needs to take drastic and urgent action on the development of dog roses and any other vegetation in the wrong place.

Broken slates on base of Grant of Ardoch enclosure and Barkly enclosure

The floors of these two enclosures were covered with broken slate from the roof of Kirkmichael to suppress vegetation. However, vegetation still grows in the broken slate itself. This needs to be ruthlessly dealt with.

Further recording of slabs

Whilst all slabs aboveground or just below the turf have been recorded, it is clear that many slightly deeper are as yet unrecorded. Some of our best stones were uncovered only when de-turfing was carried out for path-making. It is intended to publish the inscriptions of all stones at Kirkmichael in due course, and it would be good to have all these slabs recorded before then.

Now that GPS is available with much higher resolution, re-surveying of all stones in the kirkyard utilising GPS is feasible, giving a modern plan of all stones including recently discovered ones. No such plan currently exists.

Yew tree pruning or removal

There are two large yew trees in the centre of the old kirkyard which have developed since 1906 (the postcard dated 1906 does not show them to be there). These are damaging gravestones, including roots penetrating the layers of sandstone medieval stones. And if they were to tumble they would cause serious disruption. A similar tree falling in the 1980s resulted in the early 1700s slab near the Grant of Ardoch enclosure doorway being broken and projecting out of the ground. These yews need to be pruned severely or removed. Several yews on the north side of the kirkyard were pruned heavily in 2017 by the Trust and look much better for it, but had caused much damage of railings before this was done.

Future projects

Several of the above tasks could be combined in a future project for which funding can be sought. Others can be achieved by Trust volunteers. One thing for sure is – there is still plenty to do!